

Sergeant Recalls Stealing Locomotive From Japs

BY GILL SMITH
Staff Writer

Shortly after the atomic bomb blastshook Nagasaki, survivors in the razed Japanese city had another shock as a Nipponese train, loaded with Japs, and engineered by six American GI's, roared through the city with whistles blowing, and machine guns bristling from the engine.

At the throttle, in the best Casey Jones tradition, was Sgt. Creston H. Rowland, Jr., just liberated after 42 months in a Jap prison camp, heading hell-bent for American lines in Konoy.

Sgt. Rowland, his fling over, today sits quietly behind a desk in the Wilmington postoffice, recruiting young men into the army, and never tells them of the time he stole a Tojo locomotive.

The story begins Feb. 15, 1941, when Rowland, a native of Raleigh, enlisted in Uncle Sam's khaki forces, took his training at Fort Bragg, and left Angel Island, California, with no thoughts of becoming an angel at all. He came close.

A private first class in the 60th Coast artillery, Rowland was stationed on Corregidor, when Americans first heard of the Pearl Harbor attack. Rowland learned of the international date line in the South Pacific.

For four months his company fought the invader, mostly by sea and air, and then came one month of hand-to-hand battling, which was followed by the Yanks surrender May 8, which Rowland personally viewed.

For two weeks the American forces were held in Malinta tunnel hospital, which was in a valley, with the grinning Japs perched on the surrounding peaks, where they could take pot shots at the prisoners whenever they were in the



Miss Lenore Hilburn, Winter Park, takes dictation from Sgt. Creston H. Rowland, Jr., in the Wilmington United States Army Recruiting office. Rowland, a member of the recruiting staff, spent nearly four years in a Jap prison camp. (STAFF PHOTO)

mood. Conditions were poor, with no food, water or medicine, and a few men died of starvation, Sgt. Rowland said. But, that was only the beginning, and death became a close companion in later months.

After a ship journey to Cavita, an old U. S. Naval base, the prisoners were taken to Cabantuan, in boxcars, and were imprisoned in Jap jail No. 3.

"The boxcars had about a 50-man capacity, and were loaded with over 150 of us," the sergeant related.

Rowland became a cook, while at the camp, although he had never cooked before.

"There wasn't much to cook anyway," he said, "and men were dying who didn't work, because they didn't have anything to occupy their minds. I cooked rice . . . and more rice." Today the ser-

geant would just as soon not sit down to a meal of rice.

While at Camp No. 3, two men were shot by the guards for escape attempts, and hundreds suffered from lack of proper food and medical attention.

Transferred to prison camp No. 1, Rowland farmed with the idea that the harvest would be used to feed the American, Dutch and British prisoners, but he said most of the fruits of his labor went to the Japs.

"Men were dying at the rate of 90 a day, from beri-beri, dysentery, and malaria," he declared, adding that he suffered from all three maladies, and had malaria steadily for 30 months.

Some idea of the food situation can be realized, when it is known the sergeant enlisted weighing 170 pounds, and tipped the scales at 110 pounds when freed. Or rather he didn't even tip the weighing machine. His first month on American food, gained him 52 pounds, proving the Japs eat, but it ain't worth it. Today inanimate scales shudder when Rowland moves his massive 203 pound frame towards them.

As life proceeded at Camp No. 1, the Japs called for 500 healthy men to work in the coal mines in Japan proper.

"A fat man was a healthy man," Sgt. Rowland explained, "and I hadn't slimmed down too much then, so I was picked."

Aboard the ship to Japan, the sergeant continued to follow his chef's career, while most of the men gasped for air in the ship's hole.

On the journey, Capt. E. H. Hewlett, of the medical corps, performed two operations with a dull razor and no anesthetics. "That man took out an appendix and performed a successful throat operation on two of the prisoners, and the men lived. I never saw any doctor at work, that I'll remember as long as I do Capt. Hewlett," Rowland declared.

After being sprayed with lysol, on arrival in Japan, the Allied prisoners went to Camp No. 17, where they were given drill, before entering the modern coal mine, constructed with American equipment, which they were to work in.

The treatment was rough in the mine. Men were given three 15 minute smoking periods

a day, and beatings resulted from any violation. A few American were given "su n treatment" there which is the delightful Jap torture consisting of hanging in the sun by the thumbs for a few days.

While at the mine, Rowland said three men were starved to death deliberately, and another bayoneted. The starved trio were caught swapping some food for cigarettes, and the prisoner who died by the bayonet, had brought some data on the war's progress to other inmates.

Finally on Aug. 15, 1945 American planes strafed the mine entrance, and five days later C-47 transport plane arrived with a note, telling the prisoners the war was over, and the Japs had finally admitted Uncle Sam was the better man. The planes dropped food, and the guarded men broke out of camp to get at the American menu.

"We enjoyed our freedom," Sgt. Rowland will tell you, with a twinkle in his eye, that means more than words can tell. "Some of the boys took advantage of the situation, after three and half years under Nipponese control, and 'mingled with the population,'" he added.

The locomotive enters the tale here. No Yanks came to liberate the freed prisoners and the nearest American camp was 137 miles southwest at Konoy.

Rowland and five of his mobile buddies took over a motorcycle and rode to the train station, where their ambitions expanded and they decided to take over the train going to Konoy.

"Well, we had to," Sgt. Rowland apologized, "There wasn't any room in the cars."

So with a little persuasion, that the sergeant would rather not describe, the six Americans settled in the engine of the train and employed a scared Jap to shovel coal for them.

Rowland was the engineer, although it was the first time he had ever been in a engine.

Disregarding scheduled, the train began to move. According to Rowland, a Jap trainman had showed the terrible six how to start the darned thing, but forgot to point out the method used to halt the machine. But that was unimportant. They boys didn't care, they were heading toward American food, and ultimately, home.

Somewhere, along with the motor cycle and train, Rowland's friends had managed to pick up a few machine guns, the Japs evidently figured wouldn't be used anymore, and no one made any attempt to stop the wild Americans.

"We blew the whistle all the 137 miles, because we at least knew how to do that," Rowland smiled, "There were a lot of rough places on several trestles that had been shaken up by Yank bombs, but we didn't decrease our speed a bit." Of course the truth of the matter is, the good sergeant didn't know how, and the Jap passengers were getting a good old American joyride, and were all in meditation over the advisability of hari-kari.

Somehow the amateur trainmen got the locomotive stopped at Konoy, but they weren't done yet. They then proceeded to move in on an American beer train, to do some fancy, and long neglected tipping.

The GI guard made no attempt to stop the escapading, and Rowland learned later Gen. Douglas MacArthur had ordered liberated prisoners to be given anything they wanted. Of course, Rowland didn't know that, when he pilfered the train.

"Then we had our first American food, and slept in our first bed for 47 months," Rowland sighed, as he greeted a young man in his office who had unformed plans of joining the army.

The ex-prisoners climbed aboard a C-47, and circled Japan before leaving for Okinawa. They waved bye-bye to the Japs with a few well aimed American pineapples, not grown in Hawaii, Rowland related.

Next stop was the Philippines, as Rowland continued to gain weight, and then to British Columbia, by ship, where Canadian war prisoners were taken off.

Today Rowland, a husky, blond buck sergeant lives in Wilmington, with his wife, and five-month old daughter, Cynthia. He was married Nov. 7, 1945, and has settled down to forget a little about the ordeal in the Orient. But he vows he's in the army for life.

"I like it," he said.

Rowland was wounded five times in the Batan and Corregidor campaigns, and wears, besides the Purple Heart, the combat infantry badge, American defense ribbon, with two stars, the Philippine Liberation ribbon, South Pacific theatre of operation banner, with two stars, the Philippine Defense ribbon, also with a pair of stars, and several other decorations.

Rowland's official title now is recruiting sergeant at the Wilmington postoffice headquarters of the Army ground forces, but he's still a train thief to Nagasaki citizens, who won't forget the Omata-to-Konoy train arrived ahead of schedule, and didn't even slow down in Nagasaki, late Aug., 1945.

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HIERS TO ATTEND PORT CONFERENCE

Group Will Discuss Effects Of Recent Freight Rate Increases

J. T. Hiers, executive agent of the Wilmington Port Commission, will attend a meeting of the South Atlantic and Southern Ports Conference in Jacksonville, Fla., tomorrow.

Hiers, who is chairman of the Southern Traffic League, and a member of the conference, said last night that he would represent Wilmington at the meeting.

Also expected to attend the meeting called by J. F. Surdivans, of Miami, are members from the ports of Morehead City, Charleston, Georgetown and Port Royal, S. C., Savannah and Brunswick, Ga., Jacksonville, Port Pierce, Port Everglades, Miami Tampa, St. Petersburg, Sanford and Pensacola, Fla.

Scheduled for discussion by the membership are proposed federal barge line service on the Atlantic and Gulf intracoastal waterways; release of rivers and harbors funds frozen by directive of President Truman; continuance of reciprocal trade treaties and reductions in tariff duties; and the effects of recent freight rate increases on the existing relationship between all ports of the country.

HE HAS MUSTACHE CUPS

NEWTON, Mass. — (UP) — William Guild was surprised when he read in a national magazine that there were only three left-handed mustache cups in existence. His collection includes 14 — one of them a demi-tasse mustache cup.

The Hiroshima atomic bomb demolished four square miles of buildings and left another three square miles uninhabitable.

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He's Anti-Genius



Don't quote the bright sayings of your little Junior when Dr. Harlow Shapley, above, director of Harvard Observatory, is around. Declaring that of the five worst enemies of mankind, the "genius maniac" is the most potent killer, he suggested genius could be controlled by killing off, in fancy, "all intimates that show any evidence of promise of genius, or even talent." His drastic "remedy" was made in speech to American Association for the Advancement of Science in Boston, Mass. Members elected him president for 1947.

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ANOTHER BOY FOR ROONEYS

BIRMINGHAM, Ala., Jan. 4 — (AP) — It's another boy for the Mickey Rooneys.

Timothy, weighing seven pounds and 14 ounces, was born this morning in the same hospital where Mickey, Jr., arrived 17 months ago.

Mrs. Rooney, who won a Miss Birmingham contest as Betty Birmingham contest as Betty Jane Rase before meeting the movie actor, talked with her husband following Timothy's arrival, and expects him here before the end of the week.

FM Work Under Way By Highway Patrol

RALEIGH, Jan. 4 — (AP) — The Salisbury highway patrol radio station has been changed over to frequency modulation, which already has been installed in Elizabethtown and Raleigh. Captain Charles Farmer said today.

Stations at Williamston and Asheville will be switched over from amplitude modulation as soon as weather clears and materials arrive.

Captain Farmer said FM was working fine and that his cars were getting a longer range on "talk-backs" from the patrol cars.

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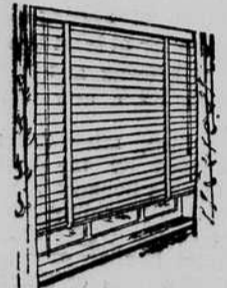
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